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SUCCESSFUL
OPERATION

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FOREWORD

For any wordsmith the most valuable word in the English language is that short, ugly, Anglo-Saxon monosyllable: No!!! It is one of the peculiarities in the attitude of the public toward the writing profession that a person who would never expect a free ride from a taxi driver, or free groceries from a market, or free gilkwoks from a gilkwok dealer, will without the slightest embarrassment ask a professional writer for free gifts of his stock in trade.

This chutzpah is endemic in science fiction fans, acute in organized SF fans, and at its virulent worst in organized fans-who-publish-fan-magazines.

The following story came into existence shortly after I sold my first story—and resulted from my having not yet learned to say No!

“Anyone who considers protocol unimportant has never dealt with a cat.”
—L. Long
SUCCESSFUL OPERATION

“How dare you make such a suggestion!”
The State Physician doggedly stuck by his position. “I would not make it, sire, if your life were not at stake. There is no other surgeon in the Fatherland who can transplant a pituitary gland, but Doctor Lans.”
“You will operate!”
The medico shook his head. “You would die, Leader. My skill is not adequate.”
The Leader stormed about the apartment. He seemed about to give way to one of the girlish bursts of anger that even the inner state clique feared so much. Surprisingly he capitulated.
“Bring him here!” he ordered.

Doctor Lans faced the Leader with inherent dignity, a dignity and presence that three years of “protective custody” had been unable to

shake. The pallor and gauntness of the concentration camp lay upon him, but his race was used to oppression. “I see,” he said. “Yes, I see . . . I can perform that operation. What are your terms?”
“Terms?” The Leader was aghast. “Terms, you filthy swine? You are being given a chance to redeem in part the sins of your race!”
The surgeon raised his brows. “Do you not think that I know that you would not have sent for me had
there been any other course available to you? Obviously, my services have become valuable.
“You’ll do as you are told! You and your kind are lucky to be alive.”
“Nevertheless I shall not operate without my fee.” “I said you are lucky to be alive—” The tone was an open threat.
Lans spread his hands, did not answer.
“Well—I am informed that you have a family...”
The surgeon moistened his lips. His Emma—they would hurt his Emma. . . and his little Rose. But he must be brave, as Emma would have him be. He was playing for high stakes—for all of them. “They cannot be worse off dead,” he answered firmly, “than they are now.

It was many hours before the Leader was convinced that Lans could not be budged. He should have known—the surgeon had learned fortitude at his mother’s breast.
“What is your fee?”
“A passport for myself and my family.”
“Good riddance!”
“My personal fortune restored to me—”
“Very well.”
“—to be paid in gold before I operate!”
The Leader started to object automatically, then checked himself. Let the presumptuous fool think so! It could be corrected after the operation.
“And the operation to take place in a hospital on foreign soil.”
“Preposterous!”
“I must insist.”
“You do not trust me?”
Lans stared straight back into his eyes without replying. The Leader struck him, hard, across the mouth. The surgeon made no effort to avoid the blow, but took it, with no change of expression....
“You are willing to go through with it, Samuel?” The younger man looked at Doctor~Lans without fear as he answered,
“Certainly, Doctor.”
“I can not guarantee that you will recover. The Leader’s pituitary gland is diseased; your younger body may or may not be able to stand up under it— that is the chance you take.”

“I know it—but I am out of the concentration camp!”

“Yes. Yes, that is true. And if you do recover, you are free. And I will attend you myself, until you are well enough to travel.”

Samuel smiled. “It will be a positive joy to be sick in a country where there are no concentration camps!”

“Very well, then. Let us commence.”

They returned to the silent, nervous group at the other end of the room. Grimly, the money was counted out, every penny that the famous surgeon had laid claim to before the Leader had decided that men of his religion had no need for money. Lans placed half of the gold in a money belt and strapped it around his waist. His wife concealed the other half somewhere about her ample person.

It was an hour and twenty minutes later that Lans put down the last instrument, nodded to the surgeons assisting him, and commenced to strip off operating gloves. He took one last look at his two patients before he left the room. They were anonymous under the sterile gowns and dressings. Had he not known, he could not have told dictator from oppressed. Come to think about it, with the exchange of those two tiny glands there was something of the dictator in his victim, and something of the victim in the dictator.

Doctor Lans returned to the hospital later in the day, after seeing his wife and daughter settled in a first class hotel. It was an extravagance, in view of his un
certain prospects as a refugee, but they had enjoyed no luxuries for years back there—he did not think of it as his home country—and it was justified this once.

He enquired at the office of the hospital for his second patient. The clerk looked puzzled. “But he is not here.”

“Not here?”

“Why, no. He was moved at the same time as His Excellency—back to your country.”

Lans did not argue. The trick was obvious; it was too late to do anything for poor Samuel. He thanked his God that he had had the foresight to place himself and his family beyond the reach of such brutal injustice before operating. He thanked the clerk and left.

The Leader recovered consciousness at last. His brain was confused—then he recalled the events before he had gone to sleep. The operation!—it must be over! And he was alive! He had never admitted to anyone how terribly frightened he had been at the prospect. But he had lived—he had lived!

He groped around for the bell cord, and, failing to find it, gradually

forced his eyes to focus on the room. What outrageous nonsense was this? This was no sort of a room for the Leader to convalesce in. He took in the dirty white-washed ceiling, and the bare wooden floor with distaste. And the bed! It was no more than a cot!

He shouted. Someone came in, a man wearing the uniform of a trooper in his favorite corps. He started to give him the tongue-lashing of his life, before having him arrested. But he was cut short.

"Cut out that racket, you unholy pig!"

At first he was too astounded to answer, then he shrieked, "Stand at attention when you address your Leader! Salute!"

The man looked dumbfounded, then guffawed. "Like this, maybe?" He stepped to the side of the cot, struck a pose with his right arm raised in salute. He

carried a rubber truncheon in it. "Hail to the Leader!" he shouted, and brought his arm down smartly. The truncheon crashed into the Leader's cheekbone. Another trooper came in to see what the noise was while the first was still laughing at his witticism. "What's up, Jon? Say, you'd better not handle that monkey too rough—he's still carried on the hospital list." He glanced casually at the Leader's bloody face.

"Him? Didn't you know?" He pulled him to one side and whispered. The second's eyes widened; he grinned. "So? They don't want him to get well, eh? Well, I could use some exercise this morning—"

"Let's get Fats," the other suggested. "He always has such amusing ideas."

"Good idea." He stepped to the door, and bellowed, "Hey, Fats!"

They didn't really start in on him until Fats was there to help.